



Questions & Answers on the NOAA Fisheries Service Endangered Species Act Proposed Recovery Plan for Southern Resident Killer Whales

(November 2006)

Q. What is a recovery plan?

A. Recovery plans are required under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for the conservation and survival of species listed as endangered or threatened. Recovery plans must include:

1. Objective measurable criteria, which when met, would result in a determination that the species be removed from the list of threatened and endangered species;
2. A description of site specific management actions necessary for recovery; and
3. Estimates of time and cost to carry out the recommended recovery measures.

Q. Didn't NOAA already put out a conservation plan?

A. We did. In October 2005, NOAA Fisheries Service released for public comment a Proposed Conservation Plan for Southern Resident Killer Whales under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). Plans under the MMPA are modeled on recovery plans required under the ESA, so the proposed conservation plan served as the basis for the proposed recovery plan.

Q. What is the difference between a conservation plan and a recovery plan?

A. The two plans have similar requirements. However, the criteria under the two laws are slightly different. Recovery plans under the ESA are developed and implemented for the conservation and survival of endangered and threatened species, so that protection from the ESA is no longer necessary. The goal of a conservation plan under the MMPA is conservation and restoration of the stock to its optimum sustainable population level. In addition to ESA recovery criteria, we also incorporated other ESA elements (such as a discussion of critical habitat) to update the plan and meet the requirements under the ESA.

Q. Does a recovery plan create new regulations?

A. No. A recovery plan is not a regulation in itself; it's a guidance document. The plan may recommend regulatory actions and/or provide guidance for voluntary initiatives. Any new regulations to protect Southern Resident killer whales would go through a public review process.

Q. Has the public been involved in the recovery planning process?

A. Yes. NOAA Fisheries Service held a series of technical workshops and public meetings to gather input from the local community on conservation measures to address the factors that may have caused the population's decline. We provided a preliminary draft conservation plan for public comment in March 2005, and a proposed conservation plan for public comment in October 2005. The proposed conservation plan served as the basis for the proposed recovery plan. Comments received on the proposed conservation plan have been incorporated or addressed as appropriate in the proposed recovery plan.